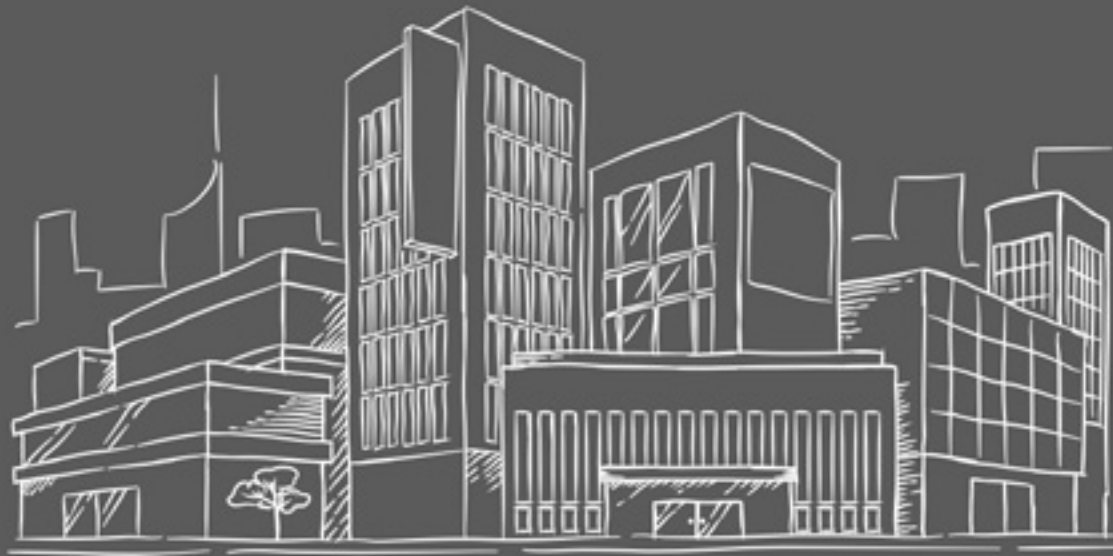




2021-2022



STORIES

from City as Lab

Part-1





“Stereotypes”

Part-1

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Preface

In Dec 2021, an unusual Bollywood film was released - about falling in love with a trans woman. Whether the audience liked it or not is somewhat irrelevant. The point of the movie (we assume), as is the point of our theme this year, was to educate, spread awareness and create empathy for people who are discriminated against for simply being themselves.

Merriam-Webster defines 'Stereotype' as forming "a standardized mental picture... that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment (about a group of people.)" Stereotype most frequently refers "to an often unfair and untrue belief that many people have about all people or things with a particular characteristic."

Story-telling is a powerful medium through which students can explore how stereotypes affect the lives of people around them. These six stories, presented in various formats across two books, are all true - researched, written and illustrated by students who participated in the CaL story project this year. They interviewed the protagonists to learn more about their lives and gave voice to their life-stories through picture books, graphic novels, first person narratives or feature stories.

Be it gender, sexuality, professional choices, disability, birthplace, cultural differences or simply the way one looks, these stories have pushed our student participants to dig deep, to truly understand how stereotyping can affect someone's confidence, psyche, ambition and identity, and to check their own privilege.

We hope they do the same for you.

CaL Team



Contents

Sarah- A Trans Woman

Rustomjee Cambridge International School & Junior College

Nishtha Manroa, Roushna Ansari, Tanisha Pattnaik

Mentor- Yasmin Vasanwala, Gretchen Ferrao

Breaking through Gender Inequality

The Cathedral and John Connon School

Falak Shah, Avika Bhatia, and Vidika Mirpuri

Mentor- Mrs. Kanika James Tucker

Journey Extraordinaire

Dr. Kalmadi Shamarao High school

Kanaka Kelkar, Isha kulkarni, Aryaman Haldule, Soham Awate

Mentor- Mrs. Monisha Abhyankar

Stereotypes- Rumstomjee Cambridge school

Rustomjee Cambridge International School & Junior College

Nishtha Manroa, Roushna Ansari, Tanisha Pattnaik

Mentor- Yasmin Vasanwala, Gretchen Ferrao



Rationale

We have often wondered, “why are transgenders (also known as ‘kinnars’) always at traffic signals seeking money from people there?” We often catch ourselves thinking, ‘is it really fair to cease opportunities from someone because of their sexuality? Or the way they are simply born?’ And now that we have a platform where we as the youth can talk about such sensitive matters and provide a voice to the voiceless, we’re keen to interact and understand the biases against trans people, and probably help to change the false narrative about trans people in our city.

According to a study, about 92% of transgenders are deprived of the right to participate in any form of economic activity in the country, with even qualified ones refused jobs. Equal opportunity to education and livelihood needs to be ensured, which means from schools, colleges to workplaces need to be sensitized and prepared to welcome trans persons and ensure that they are not discriminated against.

Reflections of students

“We learnt to speak to new people, and being comfortable and empathetic; interviewing. We also learnt to work and communicate as a team, coordinating and dividing the tasks. We are very thankful to our teachers, mentors, friends and the CaL team for their help and support during this project. The experience was definitely something we will remember and cherish.”

“I don’t exactly remember when my first encounter was, it was always when I was travelling and I would see them on the roads, going from car to car, asking for money. One time someone asked me for money and I gave some, they blessed and walked away. I to be honest had no thoughts or impressions as such, as a kid I thought it’s a “half man, half woman”, and I was okay with that, nothing to think about. Now that I’m more aware, I know that transgender are just people who do not identify with the gender they’re born with. It’s not a sin, I believe sexuality is a spectrum not a basis of what we can judge a person with or outcast them. Recently, I discovered that one of my friends is trans; I was surprised and it was a shock to me that someone who I’ve known as a him is suddenly transitioning into a her. But with time I realized it’s the same friend of mine and there wasn’t anything to feel uncomfortable about it in the first place! Also, schools should be more vocal and educate their students about trans as well as the LGBTQ+ community and how using their preferred pronouns as a sign of respect is important. I don’t think one needs to understand things to be respectable and kind towards one another.”

Hello, my name is Sarah, I work at TWEET as a warden. Prior to this, I used to beg for money on the streets but was constantly looking for a job, where I get the support and respect I deserve, and finally found one a few months back. At TWEET, we assist transgenders in several things and I actively try to make other transgenders (kinnars) aware about the education and working opportunities available for them.

I was assigned a male at birth (later underwent a surgery to change my sexual organs), but never played amongst other boys. Instead, I always liked wearing frocks, trying make-up,, and staying with other girls, but never in front of my parents. When I was younger, I didn't know that I was a transgender, just knew that I am different and like certain girly things. But, when I turned 10, people started teasing me and using slurs at me; given the way I walked or spoke. My father often used to hit my mom and I, so we left our house and lived with my maternal grandma, which she didn't really appreciate. Nobody in my family cared; they didn't even bother to educate me after grade 10.. However, my mother stayed by my side, and let me do a diploma IT course, which I passed with flying colours.

My aunt even tried black magic! This was apparently an attempt by them to 'fix' or 'help' me. A friend of mine told me about the kinnar culture, and how he wore a

saree outside the house, and I was shook, as I did that all my life inside a closet. So, I followed him, but hid it from my family. One day, my mom saw my things, and threw me out; that's when I started living with my guru. If asked about companies, I feel that they have just recently started becoming trans-friendly and have started to understand that a person's gender does not define their capability; it's just the beginning. I personally feel that the government should not only help trans people by providing employment opportunities, but also put a complete ban on begging on streets. I believe everyone is capable of working, everyone has some skill, and if not, they can always learn; doing a job and earning for yourself is much better than asking for money on the streets. I myself work in a place where I earn just Rupees 10k per month, and have no job security, but am still much happier here. However, I hope that all transgenders, including me, get opportunities for jobs with a fixed salary, benefits, permanent jobs etc. I can say that definitely, a change is seen, but there's a lot of work that needs to be done and I hope that people continue to support, volunteer and educate themselves, so that if not our generation, at least the next one is saved from these struggles and hurdles. Today, I am very pleased to say that now, both my parents are with me and support me, I have resumed my studies and have a motive in life to help others like me. Thank You.



Breaking through Gender Inequality

The Cathedral and John Connon School

Falak Shah, Avika Bhatia, and Vidika Mirpuri

Mentor- Mrs. Kanika James Tucker



Rationale

This is the story of something every working woman experiences; the struggles of the hardworking women and the challenges they face every day. The reason we have taken upon this topic is that we see some people go through gender discrimination in their day-to-day lives. These small discriminations turn into the new normal.

The stereotypes may hurt the future generation so it is important to shine some light upon them. We cannot and should not allow women to keep experiencing this; they have been tolerating this for many generations. Can you imagine that a woman who spends day and night working for her goal, can't get a job or higher position? Merely because of her gender.

We would like to use City As a Lab - CAL as an opportunity to recognize and help the women of this world. In Spite of all the hardships they face, they still go out with a smile on their face, and we would like to make that smile wider.

After researching we found out that Article 15 (i) In The Constitution Of India 1949 states that 'The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.' Our government too, believes that everyone is equal, but some people still do not. Our target group is the adolescent of today's generation and these stories will make them conscious of the gender stereotypes that exist and are changing so that they (male or female) may not discriminate based on gender and not tolerate discrimination. We would like to change the mindset of such people and create harmony between all Indians, regardless of their gender. We strongly believe that every human who is born on this Earth is equal and should be treated equally.

We are happy to announce that through our questionnaire we did receive many responses which showed that the family members of aspiring women did support them at every stage of their academic and professional career. Some women working in the office also acknowledged that there is a change in the gender stereotype in the office wherein they are given equal opportunity based on their ability. One of the stories represents a woman who is content because she is promoted based on her ability.

BREAKING

through
GENDER
INEQUALITY



Fifteen years ago, when I was ten years old, I saw a dance performance with my mother. Seeing the dancers smile and dance their hearts out, I knew that dancing was what I wanted to do. I used to think that my family would not accept my love for dance. Once they found out about my passion, they were proud that I had chosen dance as my career path. At a young age, I convinced my mother to let me join a dance class. At first, I was in love with the steps, the expressions. Just dancing on my own was the best part of my life, though it didn't last long. Over the years, I realized that no boys would attend dance classes, only girls would. It did not bother me until I started hearing the girls whispering and giggling behind my back. The safe sanctuary I imagined my class to be, was no more.

After that, I had stopped going to my dance classes, but I had not given up on my dream and continued to pursue dance by teaching myself through online YouTube videos. Learning from videos was tougher than it looked, especially trying to mimic the intricate steps that would refine my technique. It all took a great deal of my time. After six months of struggle, I finally mastered the art of dance through YouTube tutorials and felt more comfortable with videos than with actual teachers. My family had always supported and helped me. I was scared to talk about this passion during my teens with my friends but slowly, I mustered courage and came clean about my love for dancing. I expected negative reactions but to my surprise, they







After four years of training on my own, I was confident in my skills. I started dancing in public places like my school theatre, social events like parties and weddings. Everyone used to compliment me and praise my dancing skills.

After turning eighteen I finally gained the freedom to move out of my family home and get an apartment of my own in South Bombay. I started a small class with five to six children where I would coach them and groom them to be better dancers. I encouraged boys and girls to dance together. Slowly I expanded my classes. Now I coach over four hundred students. To showcase my talent and allow my students to get a feel of the stage, my students and I put on annual shows open to the public.

I have realized that some people discriminate against you due to your passions or they are jealous. You should never take hate personally instead embrace what you love and who you are.



Reflections of students

Ananya Parikh

"I had an exceptional time conversing with peers about writing our stories. This was a wonderful new experience for me and I have learnt a lot. I enjoyed working as a team and that too, online. My most favourite part, however, was making the survey questions. My peers and I had a blast while brainstorming ideas and writing down the questions. Once we received responses, we tried to visualise ourselves in the women's situation and write the stories.

Deleena Saras

"Carrying out in-depth research in this field helped me sharpen my research and analytical skills. As I engaged more with the topic I got to know more about different aspects of it, especially the corporate sector. Being a teen, it has definitely changed my perspective about gender inequality. From blocking influential opportunities to being paid low for performing the same task, women have been going through this for centuries, in different ways, and everyone must be aware about it. I believe a story is the best way to convey. I'd also like to thank CAL for providing us such an amazing opportunity."

Priyansh Rathod

"I had the opportunity to express my opinion and my thoughts without any fear. I am so thankful for such supportive teammates. I realised that women should not succumb to pressure from anyone, and rise up and be strong, because what's the difference between a male and a female? Both are hardworking, so we shouldn't harass one of them."

Sana Meher

"Hearing different views and researching about different aspects of the same topic has expanded my understanding capacity. I got to see different perspectives from different people who shared their views with us about the situation. This shows how not all people are the same and how generalizing isn't something we should continue doing. This project made me more prepared for the future. I'm so thankful for everything."

Journey Extraordinaire

Dr. Kalmadi Shamarao High school

Kanaka Kelkar, Isha kulkarni, Aryaman Haldule, Soham Awate

Mentor- Mrs. Monisha Abhyankar



Rationale

“Women are bad drivers”, “Women do not have the physical strength for driving long distances”, we often hear people say and its about time this propaganda ends. This is the story of a mother-daughter duo who have broken this stereotype and carried their way to success in this unconventional field. The mother-daughter duo of Mrs Manali Bhide and Miss Manwa Bhide travelled from Kanyakumari to Kashmir in just 8 days and that too on an Activa scooter which is not the ideal way to travel long distances ! The way these two travelled with their fantastic energy and courage captured everyone’s heart and gave a new zeal to women drivers. These two have broken into the male bastion and proved a lot of people wrong. Besides breaking the stereotype, the ladies carried banners to spread awareness about ‘Saving the Girl Child’ and ‘Organ Donation’. It takes incredible physical and mental strength to travel 500-550 kms per day. Few others did a journey similar to this in 38-40 days, but these two managed to complete their journey in just 8 days. We wish to share this story with our city

because, these two extraordinary ladies live in Pune and most of the people aren’t aware of their remarkable expedition. We also want people to get inspired by the fact that Manali Bhide encouraged her adolescent daughter Manwa who was in 8th standard to accompany her in the long scooter voyage, since, she wanted her daughter to become strong, physically and mentally to solve unexpected problems and face real-life adventures! In spite of the challenges they faced during the journey, they persisted and completed this fantastic journey.

We would like to thank them for inspiring and motivating a lot of people especially women drivers and also for spreading awareness in rural areas about saving the girl child and organ donation.

“There is no magic to the achievement. It’s really about hard work, choices and persistence.”







They ride for a few kilometres, bewildered and desperate for help when they notice a man speaking in English on his mobile and decide to ask him for the right directions.



That day, they covered 532 kms without stopping in the intense heat and reached Dharampur after 8 hours and 15 minutes.

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After reaching Dharampur, they reported to the local police station to document their journey. Later at the hotel, Manwa was very tired and felt depressed.



The next day with renewed energy, Manwa and Manali start their next leg of the journey to Hubballi.



That day they reached Hubballi covering 553 kms in 6 hrs 25 mins.

6

On the way to Hubballi, they encourage people to save the girlchild and donate organs.



The travel to Pune from Hubballi took 6 hours to cover 433 kms.
In Pune, Manwa and Manali visit a school.



Manali and Manwa continue their onward journey to Vadodara. It was the fourth day of their journey.

At Vadodara, they report to the police station of having covered a distance of 552 kms in 9 hours.



That day they covered 552 kms in 9 hours.
The next day, as news of their journey spread, people came to encourage them on their way to Rohatak.







Reflections of students

Aryaman H

"Some problems that I faced were that me and my friend were having a hard time discussing the dialogues due to our different classes & we could not fix a time to communicate with each other."

Soham Awate

"The Cal project helped me in improving my English vocabulary and dialogue writing skills. It also helped to think, plan dialogues for each page and work meticulously to incorporate the same in the pages. The project was interesting and fun."



Thank you





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STORIES

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